

Communications Team

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Antiviral Medications: Frequently Asked Questions

Are there medicines to treat H1N1 flu (swine flu)?

Yes, the antiviral medicines oseltamivir or zanamivir (brand names Tamiflu and Relenza) can treat infection with H1N1 influenza viruses. Antiviral medicines are not a cure for H1N1 flu but it can help reduce the severity of the illness. People also recover from H1N1 flu without taking Tamiflu or other antiviral medication.

How do antiviral medicines work?

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms).

How do I get Tamiflu or Relenza?

Health care providers can prescribe Tamiflu or Relenza after examining a patient and determining that person is sick enough to need the medication. Do not try to buy Tamiflu or Relenza from companies offering the drugs online without a prescription. If your doctor prescribes Tamiflu for you, do not give your medication to anyone else, even if they have the same symptoms as you do. It can be harmful for people to take this medication if their doctor has not prescribed it.

Where do I get my prescription filled?

Tamiflu and Relenza are available at commercial pharmacies, since they are routinely used to treat seasonal influenza. Currently, supplies of antiviral medications have been low at pharmacies in some areas.

King County has purchased an additional supply of antiviral medications. Part of that supply is being distributed to hospitals and other medical facilities to make sure people who are more seriously ill with flu get treatment. If your local pharmacy does not have Tamiflu, your doctor can direct you to a health care facility that can fill your prescription, or call the Public Health Flu Hotline: 1-877-903-KING (5464), TTY Relay: 711, Mon-Fri 9:00-5:00

For more information:

Public Health – Seattle & King County, www.kingcounty.gov/health/h1n1

Public Health Flu Hotline for recorded information about H1N1 flu in English and Spanish, 1-877-903-KING (5464), 24 hours/day. TTY: 711